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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NECESSITY OF RELIGION.

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The future of religion is a problem which to-day is holding the attention of many thoughtful minds, and not without reason, for nothing can be more evident than that among the educated classes there is a general dissatisfaction with the present form of religious expression and content of religious dogma. The belief of our forefathers, simple but crude, is no longer found adequate, yet there seems to be nothing better to take its place. Many fear for the future, not knowing in what direction the evolution will tend, while others generalizing from the limited view-point of their surroundings, believe that a finality in this evolution has been reached, and that religion is to decay and finally die.

Of writers holding this latter view no one, perhaps, has given more forceful expression to it than Guyau.¹ He says: "Human beliefs, when they shall have taken their final form in the future will bear no mark of dogmatic and ritualistic religion. They will be simply philosophical." Again he writes of religion: "Born as it is of certain beliefs and certain customs, its fate is one with them."

As he regards religion in its inception as 'nothing more than an imaginative extension of human society, the explanation of things by a theory of volitions,' he concludes that its end will be a return to philosophy and morals.

In his belief concerning the approaching annihilation of religion as such and a substitution for it of speculative thinking and practical ethics, Guyau finds a wide concurrence. For example, Zola asserts that the world to-day is without mysteries. Empirical knowledge has taken the place of religion. Renan has a similar view, and replaces theology with science. John Stuart Mill sees the religion of the future satisfied with an enlightened morality. Even Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "Nobody ought to be called an infidel who sees in justice the great creed of human life, and who aims at an increasingly complete adjustment of his will to his moral sense."

On the other hand there are many who regard the religious consciousness as something fundamental and implicit, and although they conceive the possibility of any particular faith

¹ "The Non-religion of the Future," New York, 1897.

as passing away, they deny that religion as such can ever be eliminated or transcended. Count D'Alviella in the Hibbert Lectures for 1891 says that God may die as his thousand predecessors, Baal, Odin, Jupiter have died, and the Israelitish Yahveh must one day die, but what cannot die is the conception, enshrined in these names of a mysterious and superhuman power, realizing himself in all the laws of the known universe, revealing himself in the voice of conscience, and the spectacle of the world. It is needless to multiply examples. The radical difference between the two views set forth above is clear without expansion, and it is not the purpose of this paper to further emphasize them, but to enquire which of the two we may accept, and if neither as a whole how we may modify and harmonize them. In order to do this it will be necessary to consider more closely the essential nature of religion itself, that we may see if it has any psychological necessity for existence, or whether it is a phenomenon of human life relatively persistent and general but nevertheless transient.

But at the very beginning we are confronted with a difficulty. A logical definition of religion seems impossible, while even a descriptive definition is hard to formulate. At the outset we may, however, disregard certain attempts to explain religion by setting forth the phenomena which have attended its development. To declare that it originated in fetishism, animism or ancestor worship is to do little more than to name the occasions of its evolution, not to consider the underlying causes.

Turning to a more fundamental conception we may notice Edward Von Hartmann's view that the nature of religion and its source are to be found in egoistic eudaemonism. This statement, however, is so manifestly prejudiced that it need not be considered here. Neither can we assent to the rationalistic explanation of Wolff and his school who made religion logical thought concerning God. Kant's reduction of it to the basis of a moral maxim deprives it of vitality. Martineau's definition of religion as 'belief in an Ever-living God, that is, a Divine Mind and Will ruling the universe' is likewise too limited to include many of the phenomena that are usually classed as religious.

Both Max Mueller and Herbert Spencer find the essence of religion in the feeling of man for the infinite. Pfeleiderer says that its roots "lie in the manner in which primitive man regarded nature and the emotions with which nature affected him." John Fiske says that the idea of God sprang from man's dependence upon something without him, and D'Alviella places its essence in the conception man forms of his relation with superhuman and mysterious powers on which he believes himself to be dependent. Finally Schleiermacher de-

finer religion as the feeling of absolute dependence. These latter views agree in emphasizing the feeling element in religion instead of the rational, and in placing man over against an irresistible power which holds his very being in its grasp. On the whole Schleiermacher's definition seems the most satisfactory, but it must be taken with certain limitations. The feeling element which is made all important cannot be merely subjective. As Principal Caird has pointed out there must be a criterion outside of feeling to which we can appeal. On the other hand we cannot agree with Caird that "to place the essence of religion in feeling is self-contradictory." The feeling in which Schleiermacher seeks to find the germs of religion is that of individual helplessness when confronted by the universal power without, but it implies knowledge and will; knowledge as to the proper relation which the individual shall sustain to the power without, and the will which seeks to realize that relation. With these limitations, then, Schleiermacher's definition is accepted by the writer of this paper, and it is now proposed to show, (1) that this definition accords with what is known about the origin and growth of religions; (2) that this feeling of absolute dependence is the essential feature of the great historic religions of the present and the past, and finally that man is so constituted by nature and environment that he can never free himself from this feeling of absolute dependence, and as a consequence must always remain religious in the sense of the definition, and hence can never transcend religion nor convert it into a mere system of philosophy or morals.

It is a widely accepted view among anthropologists that religion originated in fear, and the first worship was an attempt on the part of man to get on the right side of those powers which man conceived of as being above him. This fear seems to have been of two kinds, first the fear of the unknown, the biological reason for the evolution of which is easily to be understood, and second the fear of the terrible and destructive forces of nature, the storm, the flood and the scorching heat. Naturally these two motives for fear blend in many instances and cannot be distinguished. Interesting in this connection is the fact that the first real gods were generally connected with the sky, suggesting both mystery and power. In the course of time it would be natural for man to create not only gods whom he should worship through fear, but also those whom he regarded as helpful, and whom he could trust. Thus two emotions, fear and love, are to be found in all religions of a relatively high development, although without doubt fear is the more original of the two, and forms a larger share of all primitive beliefs.

The point to be principally noted in this connection is that

this conception of the origin of religions answers in part at least to the definition of religion which it is the purpose of this paper to defend. Such a religion as we are speaking of is essentially a feeling, and it is a feeling which objectifies itself, that is becomes an emotion, this emotion being based on the recognition of the dependence of man upon something without him. So primitive religion may well be defined as a feeling of dependence, though as yet the dependence has not become absolute. In order that it may become so another step in religious evolution is necessary. Man as purely naïve does not regard his dependence upon superhuman powers as any more absolute than he does his dependence upon his fellow men. It is only in a higher stage of reflection that he recognizes that he cannot flatter, cajole or get the best of his gods, as he does of his neighbors. Even in such a well developed religion as that of the Greeks this feeling of absolute dependence is slight in the earlier period of Mythology. Prometheus, the type of man rebellious and partially successful against the will of Zeus, is a product of unreflecting atheism.

Man originally was neither an optimist nor a pessimist, for both of these attitudes toward life presuppose reflective thinking. Yet we must regard primitive man as taking a real joy in life, and not becoming despondent under pain, for his consciousness had not been "sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought." But before he has reached a very high stage of development, a strain of pessimism appears, and in pessimism, relative or absolute, is true religion born. For when it is recognized that there are ills from which human beings cannot escape by their own efforts, then comes the feeling of absolute dependence. Were the world perfect, or even relatively satisfactory, there would be no need of religion. But it is not, and it is in this radical imperfection that, as Schopenhauer puts it, is found the metaphysical necessity for worship of the divine. Man, says Von Hartmann, first believed that happiness was attainable for him as an individual, but he found this to be a delusion, then he said, 'though I cannot be happy, my children may,' but this he found also untrue; then in his despair he created heaven. So have thought the pessimists; but in a similar strain writes the great optimist Hegel in regard at least to this life when he says: "All that awakens doubt and perplexity, all sorrow and care, all limited interests of finitude, we leave behind us on the bank and shoal of time.

It is in this native land of the spirit that waters of oblivion flow, from which it is given to Psyche to drown all her sorrows; for here the darkness of life becomes a transparent dream-image through which the light of eternity shines in upon us." Even John Fiske cannot regard this

world as entirely satisfactory, and when he thinks of man in the light of his origin he cannot believe that this world is all. Life rests on mystery.

Turning to a consideration of the great historic religions we may first notice those of the East.

Among the deities of the Vedas stand forth Varuna and Indra, both deities of the heavens. Varuna especially was a god of mystery and power, a ruler whom none might oppose with impunity. Later in the philosophy of Brahmanism the Indian religion had passed beyond its unreflecting stage and plunged itself into mysticism. Man is completely dependent upon Brahma from whom he issued forth and to whom he must return. The world is viewed with pessimism. It is Maja,—illusion. Redemption is freedom from the thrall of the senses.

Buddha came more than five centuries before the birth of Christ, and presented even a more pessimistic view of the world, though he did not supplant in any way the Brahmanistic *Weltanschauung*. Life is an endless round of pain, to escape from it Salvation, Nirvana the *summum bonum*. The individual is nothing in himself, and absolutely dependent on the world principle.

“ The dew is on the lotus: rise great Sun!
And lift my leaf and mix me with the wave,
Om Mani padme hum, the sunrise comes,
The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.”¹

Another Aryan religion, the Persian, has a pronounced strain of pessimism in it, with its world struggle between the good and the evil. Its fundamental character is well emphasized in the Book of Job.

The Greek religion as we find it in Homer is very naïve and childlike. The Greeks in the vigor of their youth and early manhood took too much joy in life to evolve a deep and powerful religion. They made their gods a little higher than themselves and intensely human, but above all—gods and men alike—ruled Fate from which none could escape. As civilization grew the priestcraft in the mysteries of Dionysius and Demeter developed a more spiritual worship, one calculated to stir the religious feelings to their very depths, and awaken the emotions of awe and fear in the dreadful presence of the Gods, as revealed to the neophytes through the trickery of the priests. The Greek enlightenment scoffed at the belief of the people, and the Sophists sought to do away with religion and morals alike, but Plato reasserted the worth of the divine and made the only reality that of the beyond, while the world itself was

¹ Sir Edwin Arnold: The Light of Asia.

but a realm of shadows. Here pessimism in regard to the worth of this life powerfully asserts itself.

Of the Roman religion not much can be said; it was in the later days at least mostly formal, but nevertheless its elaborate rites emphasized to a peculiar degree the dependence of the people on the power of the gods.

As the ancient civilization began to decay and as the world-despair grew, how inadequate proved mere philosophies; Stoicism, with its "renounce and bear," and Epicureanism with its grasping after pleasure. Both were thoroughly pessimistic, but neither offered any real escape from the evils of life. Then came Christianity and saved mankind from utter ruin, not by putting greater worth into this life, but by making the life to come the hope of the disconsolate.

The Hebrew religion from which Christianity grew represents the highest type of Semetic religions. "The fundamental trait of the Semetic belief in God," says Pfeiderer, "is that of his separateness from the world, oppositeness to man, who feels himself to be a powerless slave over against the overmastering deity." The Hebrew religion emphasizes this pessimism and dependence. No darker picture was ever painted of life than is found in Job and the Preacher. Yahveh, originally a storm god, is a being of vengeance and justice, but never of love.

In Islam Allah, is "an absolute almighty ruler, fearful in his anger, arbitrary in his rewards and punishments, his will incomprehensible and irresistible; he requires from men slavish subjection, and even this does not certainly secure his favor. . . To this dark view of the deity there corresponds a somewhat pessimistic estimate of the world; it is compared to a dung heap full of rotting bones; its misery is so great that it can only be surpassed by the tortures of hell."¹

The religion of Christ in no sense does away with the pessimism of the Jewish faith in which it takes its roots, neither does it make man less independent of the heavenly power. In fact by doing away with formalism it makes the dependence more direct and subjective. It is not sufficiently recognized to-day what a deep strain of pessimism runs through the teachings of Jesus and the faith of early Christianity. This world and the kingdom of heaven were placed in inverse ratio, and it was only as the one was renounced that the other was to be gained. Further, Christ demanded an absolute renunciation, complete self-surrender and dependence upon God, and the early Christians understood his doctrine in this way. The world turned eagerly to Christianity because mankind was help-

¹ Pfeiderer: "The Philosophy of Religion," London, 1888.

less. It is to be doubted that had Christ appeared a few centuries earlier when the world was more optimistic, if the religion of the Nazarene could have received such ready support as it did. Christ came indeed in the 'fulness of time.'

The Christianity of the middle ages departed widely from that of the early centuries. Formalism took the place of the truer and deeper religion, though in æscetism and mysticism the spiritual fires were kept from going out.

It is hard to estimate the Christian life of to-day, but it is characterized by less of real dependence and surrender of self than that of earlier times. The feeling of the age, especially here in America, is not deep enough to turn the mind toward the transcendent. We are too much engrossed in the things of this world, too self-confident, too prosperous to think profoundly of the beyond. There is a great deal of talk to the effect that Christianity will be transcended because the world has progressed too far intellectually to longer accept the old-time dogma. To my mind the lessening of the religious life of the time is not a matter of intellect, but of feeling, and there is sure to be a rebound when a deep wave of pessimism sweeps over the world.

We have now reached the final question which it is the purpose of this discussion to consider; namely, granted that religion has been properly defined as the feeling of absolute dependence, can it ever be transcended or eliminated? The answer must be a decided no. And this for two reasons.

First, as we conceive it religion might be done away with if intelligence were perfect and knowledge absolute. If there were nothing left to be known, if all mysteries were cleared up, if we could see the whole plan of the universe unfold, whether it was for weal or for woe, then we might in the cold light of reason look at life without worshipping the power which controlled it. If its end were order and happiness then we might enjoy life in its fullness, and bear sorrow and pain with fortitude, seeing the good beyond; if, on the other hand, the end were mere nothingness, a return to original chaos, if all were without a plan and life without meaning, then we could become either Stoics or Epicureans. But an absolute knowledge is manifestly impossible. We can never know more than phenomena, and as the phenomena are infinite our knowledge must always remain infinitesimal. Too much value has always been given to intelligence. It is but a spark in the darkness. A large proportion of life is feeling, and we are always tending to lapse into the unconscious. Mere intellect can never hope to solve the mystery of the universe. Science when rightly interpreted has not removed mysteries, but revealed new ones. We know no more of the meaning of life or the destiny of humanity

than did Plato. Moreover, it is unthinkable that we ever can know. In the presence of the riddle of the universe we may not always pause and reflect, but when we do, when we remove ourselves from the whirl of existence, the eternal question of life's meaning must impress itself upon us. He who imagines that reason can answer the demands of the human heart, has never deeply and profoundly thought.

Secondly, religion might be dispensed with were life satisfactory in itself, but that it can never be. Pierre Lasserre (in *La Crise Chrétienne, Questions d'Aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1891,) maintains that philosophy and science have failed to solve the meaning of suffering. "There is more truth in the profound astonishment of simple souls when a great blow falls on them, than in any other attitude spontaneous or reflective. In that may be recognized the intuition of a natural mystery."¹ Eradicate pain, death and sin from the world and religion will be needless; as long as they remain there must be a profound pessimism running through life, and it is religion alone which will give this existence value for the countless thousands who toil and suffer.

We must not look at man in his strength alone and judge life accordingly; if we do our view is limited and narrow. The fields of drudgery, the hospitals, the prisons, the almshouses, the places of mourning; we must consider them as well.

On a sunlit September afternoon the chief of a powerful nation stands full of life, energy and assurance. The future is bright, the present seems secure. A week later in the darkness and silence of the night, with life at an end and the death agony already upon him the heroic sufferer murmurs, "Thy will be done!" How weak is man, how absolutely dependent on the forces about him—the plaything of circumstance, the sport of fate! Human life, passing from mystery to mystery, attended by pleasure, but also by pain, is not sufficient unto itself.

¹ Quoted from *Pedagogical Seminary*.